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ABSTRACT

In response to the growing dissatisfaction of students in the late 1960's to the traditional educational system, where the student felt forced into a role of dependency and passive consumption, the Swedish Commission on University Education suggested an instructional system of supervised student teams as a supplement to regular instruction. The team system was thought to reduce a number of the problems facing the new mass university. This report on the completed project describes the design, execution, and timetables of the main experiment, the results of the experimental project, an inventory and analysis of other experiments with supervised teams, and evaluation of experiments with work and examination in teams in training courses for future psychologists. (JMF)

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Background and aims

The initiation of the project and the original formulation of its aims were heavily influenced by the criticism on the content, organization and instructional methods of the traditional university, that accompanied the "student explosion" and reached its peak during the "student revolts" in 1968 and 1969. The prevailing system forced the student into a role of dependency and passive consumption, it was maintained both by students and teachers. The ability to reproduce factual knowledge at written examinations almost completely determined the grade of the student in spite of official declarations that stressed personal growth and higher level cognitive capacities as important objectives of higher education. The traditional teacher-dominated instructional methods were thought to be important obstacles to the development of active and lasting contacts between teachers and students and between students mutually. Student psychiatrists reported a rapidly growing number of students whose main problem was severe social isolation.

The Swedish Commission on University Education (UPU) working during the second half of the sixties discussed these problems and proposed a number of measures. In a policy report on instructional methods published in 1970 the Commission suggested a system of supervised student teams as a supplement to regular instruction. The team system was thought to reduce a number of the problems facing the new mass-university.

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In the first project-plan of the so-called UIA-project (Swedish: "universitetsstudier i arbetsgrupp"), written in 1971, the team-work model of UPU was a central idea. The main purpose of the initial phase of the project was to implement the team-model in an ordinary instructional setting and to evaluate various effects of participation in teams. The evaluation work was intended to take into consideration both study results in a limited sense and effects on the students' situation, both socially and individually.

The very close association to the outlines of a system of supervised teams formulated by UPU remained only for a short time of the project, however. The initial experiment indicated that the regular teacher-dominated lecturesystem and work in supervised teams demanded different study rythms and in part also different study methods. The social dynamics developing within a small team working together for some time stimulated the team members to demand that the team activities should be something more and something else than just a subordinate complement to regular instruction. Both the supervisor and the team members found themselves faced with a choice between two instructional systems.

The experiences of the initial experiment caused a change in the focus of interest of the project. For the most part the project has been concerned with systems of instruction where activities in supervised teams form the base and other types of instruction such as lectures are offered for introduction, context and inspiration.

Design, execution and timetable

The project extended over three academic years: 1971 - 1974.

During 1971 and 1972 two experiments with university studies in supervised teams were carried out at the A1 course in Education at the university of Gothenburg.

The first experiment served mainly as a planning study for the main experiment which was carried out during the 1972 autumn term.

During 1973 a series of field experiments with work and examination in small groups were evaluated. These experiments were inspired by the UIA-experiments but were neither planned nor carried out within the project.

During 1973 and 1974 an inventory and analysis of reports from experiments with supervised teams was made. The inventory concentrated on Swedish experiments, but also included an unsystematic review of the international literature. The analysis of literature was reported as an invitation paper to a symposium on "Methodological problems in experiments with supervised teams". The symposium which was arranged by the Office of the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities was held in Sånga-Säby near Stockholm in October 1974.

The main experiment 1972

The main experiment, in the autumn of 1972, consisted of four teams, each comprising eight students and two control groups each comprising about thirty students. Participants for the teams and one of the control groups were chosen at random at the beginning of the term from among those who had signed up for working in teams in connection with registering for the course. The other control group was chosen at random from among students who indicated that they did not want to participate in a team. Two teachers served as tutors throughout the whole four month long course.

The team-model tested consisted of scheduled tutor-led team meetings, tutor-less team meetings and participation in an introductory lecture in each of the five parts of the course. The teacher-resource spent on the teams was the same as the resource spent on the students participating in regular instruction. This meant a considerably smaller number of teacher-contact for team-members than for other students. During the main part of the experiment there were one or two scheduled team meetings with the tutor each week. At the start of each sub-course the tutor provided the teams with a number of problems and questions to facilitate their planning and work. The questions were designed to stimulate co-operation and an active, independent approach to the course material. The course literature was fixed and the teams participated in the ordinary examinations.

Result of the main experiment

Evaluation data which were collected included: ordinary examinations, a comprenhensive test given at the end of the term, tests designed to measure study proficiency, three questionnaires given at the beginning, middle and end of the term and the tutors' working notes. No differences between teams and control groups were found on the ordinary examinations, but on the comprehensive test the teams performed slightly better. Team members improved their study proficiency during the term, which was not the case for the control groups. The social benefits of the team model were impressive. Almost half of the team members got new friends during their months in teams compared to only a few in the control groups attending regular instruction. Some team members reported rather drastic positive changes in their self-image. More team members than control group members thought they had been able to significantly influence their working situation during the term.

The analysis of the tutors' working notes and the questionnaires indicated among other things a conflict between an examination system with fixed written items and individually assigned grades and a working model where one is striving for problem-oriented co-operation. In an educational system where students, because of the nature of the examination system, lack every possibility to influence the direction and content of their studies and where the examination focuses solely on the performance of the individual student the students are actually forced to defend themselves against the study involvement governed by personal needs and interests that often

evolves after some time in a team. Analysis of the team work process indicated that the teams need training for co-operation. The participants have to learn what should be done during team sessions and what should be done by individual work. The tutor have an important task in helping the team to explore its potential teaching resources. The first few team sessions seem to be very important for the later development of the team work process. The tutors must prevent the team from an early freezing in a destructive role structure and interaction pattern. In accordance with similar experiments the UIA-experiment indicates that each team has to develop its own unique style of work. The tutor therefore has to function as a catalyst in the team process and not as a demonstrator of the *right* working model.

Inventory and analysis of other experiments with supervised teams

After the main experiment an inventory and analysis of experiments with supervised teams was carried out. Because of the ambition of the project to produce results with direct applicability to university instruction in Sweden the inventory focussed on Swedish experiments. Considerable pains were taken to cover recent experiments in various disciplines as completely as possible. After long series of letters, telephone calls and personal interviews a considerable number of rather informal experiments were found. The written reports, where they existed at all, were with few exceptions meagre and incomplete. The major part of the experiments were in ignorance or neglect of educational and social-psychological theory. The motives for testing study team models ranged from efforts to increase the control of the students´ independent work to ambitions to increase the students´ freedom to learn. The actual team models, as they were implemented in regular courses, turned out to be considerably more similar than the motives for designing the models.

Most experiments with supervised teams seem to have brought to attention problems of authority, responsibility and influence and intensified discussions on the relation between the teachers´ and the students´ roles in the instructional process. Teachers participating as supervisors in most cases report better intellectual and emotional relations to the students and increased personal satisfaction. The price they have had to pay consists of a more pronounced sense of responsibility for individual students and more work between the instructional sessions.

Most experiments comprise so few weeks of study that the experiencies reported should be regarded as reports about efforts to change a traditional instructional pattern rather than reports about supervised teams having had time and opportunity to develop well-functioning models of work.

Evaluation of experiments with work and examination in teams in training courses for future psychologists

During 1973 experiments with work and examination in teams were initiated in two applied courses included in the basic training for

psychologists in Göteborg. The courses comprised six weeks each. The aim of the experiments was to develop forms of examination which make examination an integral part of the training program and not just a final control. As a consequence of this standpoint we tried to arrange examination forms which promoted problem orientation and independent critical processing of the course material. The teacher resources available for the theoretical parts of the courses were used for oral group examination. Instead of lectures the teams were supplied with questions, problems and tasks for teacherless team-work. Only a few hours of tutoring were offered.

The design of the examination system and the result of the evaluation were summarized in the evaluation report in the following way.

"In one of the courses the examination form consists of three parts and covers a full day. One of the parts is a rather comprehensive practical task which has to be planned, implemented and reported during the examination day. In the other course the examination form consists of oral reports and discussions of team-work on a number of assigned problems of applied nature. Each team has to report about their work in two sessions. The teams are given some freedom to choose tasks according to their interests."

The students participating in the experiments were invited to describe effects of the examination forms in a questionnaire composed of both open and closed questions. The students unanimously maintained that both of the examination forms tested led to better knowledge, deeper insight, better co-operation, less competition, better contact between students and teachers and more intense involvement in work than conventional written examination.

In connection with the evaluation of the experiments with examination in teams a review of research on the effects of forms of examination on learning strategies and study mehtods was made.

Reports[1]

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Universitetsstudier i arbetsgrupp. Rapport från en försöksverksamhet med nya arbetsformer. Del 1: Syfte, uppläggning och några resultat. (University studies in teams. Report from experiments with new methods of work. Part 1: Purpose, design and some results.)
Reports from the Department of Education, University of Gothenburg. No. 95. Mimeo. 1973

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Universitetsstudier i arbetsgrupp. Rapport från en försöksverksamhet med nya arbetsformer. Del 2: Handledarnas dagboksanteckningar och deltagarnas värdering av verksamheten samt analys av styrningsproblem i arbetsgrupper. (University studies in teams. Report from experiments with new methods of work.

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1975-08-06
Anders Fransson